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ABSTRACT

In December 1992, the Community College Roundtable, a group of 10 two-year college practitioners, convened to identify the core indicators of community college effectiveness. This report identifies and defines a few such measures that can be put to use on community college campuses nationwide. After part I of the report explains the composition and purpose of the Roundtable, part II presents an overview of the emergence of institutional effectiveness as a compelling issue on community college campuses and discusses how the set of core indicators was developed. Part III reviews the aims, purpose, focus, and organization of the report. Part IV provides a brief discussion of institutional effectiveness and how it can be defined and considered in community colleges. Part V includes definitions and guidelines for measuring core indicators. Part VI lists 13 core indicators according to mission category. The indicators are: (1) student goal attainment; (2) persistence (fall to fall); (3) degree completion rates; (4) placement rate in the work force; (5) employer assessment of students; (6) number and rate of transfers; (7) performance after transfer; (8) success in subsequent, related coursework; (9) demonstration of critical literacy skills; (10) demonstration of citizenship skills; (11) client assessment of programs and services; (12) responsiveness to community needs; and (13) participation rate in service area. Sources of data for each indicator are listed along with additional, related measures of effectiveness. Part VII offers suggestions for utilizing and measuring the indicators. Finally, part VIII lists five references. (AC)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGES: CORE INDICATORS OF EFFECTIVENESS

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A REPORT OF THE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE ROUNDTABLE

JC 940 176

COMMUNITY COLLEGES:
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CORE INDICATORS
.....
OF EFFECTIVENESS
.....

**A REPORT OF THE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE ROUNDTABLE**

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INTRODUCTION

The Community College Roundtable is a special purpose group of community college executive officers, university professors, and higher education officials linked by a common interest in institutional effectiveness. Each member of the roundtable, a list of whom is provided below, brings a wealth of knowledge and experience about community colleges to the task of identifying effectiveness indicators. This special report is a reflection of their knowledge and experience.

A number of people and organizations have come together to frame the core indicators that are the focus of this report. We are particularly indebted to Kay McClenney, who organized and facilitated the meeting of the roundtable, and to Nancy Armes LeCroy, who took on the initial analysis and writing assignment. We are also indebted to Peter Ewell, who agreed to develop technical descriptions for the core indicators and to Richard Alfred, who prepared the manuscript for publication. Several members of the roundtable conducted workshops at the annual meetings of AACC, the Community College Consortium, and the League for Innovation in the Community College to sharpen the focus of the core indicators. Their work, coupled with the lively, ongoing participation of each member of the roundtable, made this collaborative effort a positive experience.

This special report is dedicated to the many practitioners involved in assessing and improving effectiveness in our colleges. As the users and producers of effectiveness information and the target audience of this report, they are the ultimate customers.

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PREFACE

Institutional effectiveness. Why is this term so frequently before us, and what does it mean for community colleges?

There are several reasons for the emergence of institutional effectiveness as a compelling issue in our colleges: the passage of Student Right to Know legislation mandating reporting of graduation statistics, rising public interest in institutional costs and performance, changing accreditation guidelines, funding shortfalls, and changing student populations. Many of our colleges have responded by identifying performance indicators and building effectiveness models. Some of these models are simple, and some are complex. Together they form a maze of possibilities for measuring effectiveness, most of which may not be generalizable from one locale to another, given institutional differences in size, location, funding, campus culture, and so forth.

Students, business and industry officials, resource providers, faculty and administrators, and other major stakeholders in our colleges are continually faced with making judgments about institutional effectiveness. As they make choices concerning which college to attend, how much money to allocate, what programs to develop, or which students to hire, they invariably inject information about high quality (effective) performance and poor quality (ineffective) performance into the judgment equation. This information may be obtained through direct contact with a college, or it may be obtained through secondary experience (i.e., conversations with friends, newspapers, college publications, and so on). When individuals find it difficult to make judgments on the basis of direct experience (e.g., enrollment in classes), they will not postpone judging the institution. Rather they will make judgments on the basis of secondary criteria that are readily available (e.g., personal beliefs about higher education, campus appearance, or articles in the newspaper). Unfortunately, these substitutes for direct experience may have little or nothing to do with institutional performance.

Faculty and administrators, meanwhile, struggle to identify legitimate factors that can be measured easily, that relate to institutional goals, and that have some practical utility. Lacking appropriate models, administrators may turn to easily quantified factors such as growth in programs, enrollments, and budgets. In this way, growth can become the index of effectiveness. Although no one familiar with community colleges would argue that growth is not important, its use as the primary indicator of effectiveness makes community colleges especially vulnerable to critics. Needed are models for assessing effectiveness that are

unique to the community college and that reflect core measures implicit in its mission.

It was with this background that in December 1992 ten educators bringing considerable expertise and interest in community college effectiveness convened to identify core indicators of effectiveness. Three organizations pooled people and resources to support the work of the group: the Community College Consortium, the Consortium for Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success in the Community College, and the Education Commission of the States. Working under the name of the Community College Roundtable, the group had as its goal to help community college practitioners respond coherently to a simple but important question: What are the core indicators of community college effectiveness? The report that follows begins to answer this question by identifying and defining a few such measures that now, it is hoped, can be put to use on community college campuses throughout the nation.

The core indicators that follow must be viewed as a beginning. Effectiveness is a topic that has no end—there are as many different approaches as there are institutions. Confronted with pressing issues such as changing accreditation guidelines and federal and state policies, our colleges have no choice but to become involved in the effectiveness arena. Knowing this, the roundtable moved ahead with the core indicators project. We sought advice from practitioners concerning needed changes in the core indicators. Many suggestions were provided, including the need for a strong focus on diversity and a core indicator devoted to general education. These practitioners pointed out that the shrinking world in which we live has placed great value on skills in “leading and managing diversity,” “international and intercultural awareness,” “human relations,” and “ability to work in teams.”

Others responding to our query looked inside the college for indicators describing the culture of the institution: its vitality, efficiency, effectiveness, and environment—its people. To be effective, a college should reflect the language of flexible, dynamic learning organizations.

These are some of the comments provided by practitioners in response to the core indicators. Others will follow as practitioners read and reflect on the report. The roundtable encourages feedback from practitioners and interested observers concerning the mission categories and the core indicators in this special report. Our work is simply an introductory effort. It can be improved and refined through the work of practitioners daily involved with matters of effectiveness on campuses throughout the nation.

*Richard Alfred
Paul Kreider
Kay McClenney*

AIMS AND PURPOSE

The internal and external challenges confronting our colleges mandate careful attention to effectiveness. Faculty and staff daily face the daunting task of providing high-quality, flexible education that is relevant to the needs of increasingly diverse students at the same time resources are being held constant or reduced. They are beginning to understand assessment as a tool for improving performance and allocating resources, and they have made substantial progress in pursuing various assessment goals. They have also experienced considerable confusion as they have been forced to sort through and select from a bewildering array of mandates, initiatives, propositions, and methodologies related to institutional effectiveness.

Community colleges across the nation have generally been asked to find their own way when making choices about effectiveness, and their actions have varied greatly depending on accreditation region, pattern of state coordination, local history, and institutional characteristics. This wide range of institutional circumstances has not only created problems for individual colleges, but it has also made it extremely difficult to treat institutional effectiveness as a discipline and to create a unified framework for its analysis. Colleges without a model or "prescription" for effectiveness have experienced difficulty in presenting their best case to policy makers at the state, regional, and national levels—a circumstance that has encouraged policy makers to issue wide-ranging, often confusing accountability mandates of their own. Parties interested in effectiveness on campus, in communities, in state capitals, and in policy arenas need a better way to focus their efforts if some clarity is to be brought to the institutional effectiveness issue.

IMPORTANCE OF CORE INDICATORS

In order to address this concern, the Community College Roundtable engaged in a series of meetings and discussions between December 1992 and August 1993 that led to this report. The overall goal was to provide a much-needed focus on effectiveness by identifying a small group of core indicators that could be used by any college, regardless of its location, accreditation region, or institutional circumstance. As a term, "core" has many meanings, but when applied to effectiveness it conveys a sense of immediacy in identifying indicators that must be measured, in contrast to those that should be measured (for example, measuring student outcomes, in work and further education, that can serve as a basis for

making program improvements or meeting external needs, in contrast to measuring an institution's economic impact).

The first objective was to reduce a complex array of models, indicators, and methods in the effectiveness arena into a set of core indicators. These indicators are essential measures of effectiveness that reflect important functions at community colleges, external mandates, or pressing constituency needs. Among the characteristics important for a core indicator are generalizability across institutions, ease and efficiency of use, relevance to the community college mission, and significance to multiple customers.

Core indicators improve performance in significant ways beyond the act of assessment. They help community colleges focus on important matters, on those activities within the educational enterprise that are most indicative of and important to student success. They also help colleges become less self-referential—to listen more rigorously to those they serve. At the same time, the use of core indicators results in information that increases the public's understanding and trust of community colleges, especially at the policy level, making it more likely that external decision-making groups will hold our institutions accountable on matters that are appropriate and substantive.

FOCUS OF THE REPORT

This report does not attempt to consider institutional effectiveness in its entirety, but rather to identify a select few core indicators that describe the major mission tasks that a community college must accomplish to be successful. In this way, the suggested indicators are similar to box score highlights on the sports page. They are an evaluative shorthand, focused on key success factors that enable practitioners and observers to better understand what our colleges do, but that are not intended to provide the details necessary for a full understanding of the comprehensive community college mission.

In order to achieve this focus, important factors such as institutional culture, strategic planning, resource allocation, and the various elements of a comprehensive program of staff and organizational development have not been included. Although vital to ensuring a healthy institution, these contextual factors require a more complex, broad-based examination that is beyond the scope of this publication. Nor do the core indicators attempt to address specific student learning outcomes or the numerous programs and processes that routinely promote and support student success. The evaluation of these substantive teaching and learning matters is again part of a larger and different discussion. Rather, the community college mission is the focus of effectiveness in this report. This singular emphasis provides the following benefits:

- It makes the fundamental goal of institutional effectiveness—the desire to link purpose, resources, and outcomes—clear and explicit.
- It is the appropriate foundation for understanding the interactive relationship between the college and the community, making it possible to trace

- changes in mission in response to local needs and expectations.
- It seeks to encompass the breadth of what community colleges do and to acknowledge the strong correlation between the way they are organized and the functions they perform.
- It brings much-needed clarity to the community college's complex educational agenda, categorizing a vast array of programs and tasks under a comparatively simple rubric.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This report is organized into three major sections. The first section provides a brief overview of effectiveness and how it can be defined and considered in community colleges. The second section includes definitions and guidelines for measuring core indicators. Thirteen core indicators are organized and presented according to mission category. A short narrative describing each mission category is presented, followed by a brief definition of the core indicator(s) recommended for measuring this category. The final section provides detailed technical descriptions of the indicators, including statistical advice, data sources, and a brief analysis of unresolved questions or concerns related to assessment. These technical descriptions provide an initial reference point to stimulate further dialogue about the core indicators. The report closes with a statement outlining steps that need to be taken with the core indicators and suggesting strategies for advancing the effectiveness agenda.

WHAT IS INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS?

Effectiveness is difficult to define and hence, difficult to measure. While effectiveness may be generally understood as the ability of a college to produce desired outcomes with the different publics it serves (Alfred and Kreider, 1991), or as the "fit" between institutional purpose and performance (Ewell, 1992), specific judgments of college effectiveness vary according to the needs and values of major stakeholders. As Cameron (1986) states, effectiveness is a problem that defies easy quantification or solutions.

We know that our colleges seek congruence between the outcomes associated with or implied by their mission and the needs of constituencies they serve. Not everyone has an equal voice in determining the extent to which a college is effective or ineffective. Therefore, we can say that effectiveness is made up of three Ps: publics, performance, and perception. Effective community colleges engage in successful transactions with important groups (publics). They are able to compare the results achieved (performance) with needs and expectations. They provide information about performance in ways that build understanding (perception) of their mission and purpose. Effectiveness suggests that a college has a discernible mission, is producing outcomes that meet constituency needs, and can conclusively document the outcomes it is producing as a reflection of its mission.

MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

Practical guidelines are necessary for any discussion of effectiveness. The following definitions provide the necessary context for a discussion of core indicators.

DEFINITIONS AND MEASUREMENT GUIDELINES

- The effective community college creates successful outcomes for multiple constituencies—internal and external. These outcomes serve as a benchmark for the community college mission by comparing results to purpose.
- When outcomes are compared to the institution's mission and goals, the result is a composite picture of an institution's effectiveness.
- An indicator that helps to create this composite picture is a concrete piece of information describing a condition or result of the community college that can be regularly produced, publicly reported, and systematically used in decision making.
- A core indicator is a measure that describes a critical, widely recognized outcome of mission, one that is clearly responsive to key constituent groups and is regularly produced.

Since the measurement of core indicators should reflect and support sound assessment practice, the following guidelines, framed as questions, make it more likely that their measurement will conform to accepted practice and that specific measures will become useful tools for determining effectiveness.

- Is the indicator supported by a comprehensive information system?
- Is it part of a commitment to track important data over time, ensuring that documenting and improving effectiveness is a developmental process?
- Is there a standard of comparison or a benchmark against which progress can be measured?
- Is the ongoing reliability of the indicator regularly assessed? Are changes made when needed?
- Is the indicator credible to college personnel who are in a position to change institutional behavior?
- Can the indicator be readily understood by external decision makers? Is

it credible to them?

- Does the indicator provide information that will help the institution to improve? Does it encourage the institution to value the right things?
- Does the indicator reflect the perspectives and concerns of multiple constituencies?
- Can data be obtained for the indicator at a reasonable cost?

MISSION CATEGORIES AND CORE INDICATORS

In the following pages, thirteen core indicators, grouped under six mission headings, are described. Each section includes a introductory statement that emphasizes key mission themes and provides advice.

Student Progress

Student progress and achievement come in many shapes and forms in community colleges. The progress measures suggested here support the assessment of mission effectiveness by providing an overall picture of student success. They reinforce the understanding that student achievement is developmental and requires tracking both intent and behavior over time.

The Student Goal Attainment measure seeks to capture individual intent and then trace its achievement. It is the most important of the indicators. The other two measures, Term-to-Term Persistence and Degree Completion Rates, follow the behavior of cohorts of students and are less descriptive indicators. They are included here in part because they are so frequently mandated at state and federal levels, but also because they can become useful tools when incorporated into a larger effort to chart student progress. The danger lies in misinterpreting this aggregate data by applying traditional academic beliefs or assumptions about persistence and degree completion to the much broader range of behaviors that community college students exhibit.

Core Indicator 1: Student Goal Attainment

Core Indicator 2: Persistence (Fall to Fall)

Core Indicator 3: Degree Completion Rates

Career Preparation

As the job market changes, career programs are not only growing in importance, but they are also constantly responding to shifting expectations. Fewer curriculum pathways require exactly two years to complete, and fewer career ladders relate neatly to associate degree preparation. More employees are turning to quick-response noncredit programs for career education. They are beginning to see initial preparation for work and later upgrading of job skills as part of a continuum; work force readiness has become an ongoing task that requires a variety of programmatic responses.

Core indicators need to reflect these dynamics and make the assessment of various forms of career preparation a routine activity. The following guidelines will help in this process. First, the evaluation of a student's career goals should not be based on either certificate or degree completion. Employers should have the chance to provide feedback on more than their own general satisfaction. They need to be able to comment on results relating to student retention, promotion, and capacity for career-long growth. Finally, an effort should be made to measure noncredit and continuing education functions, as well as credit functions in career preparation.

Core Indicator 4: Placement Rate in the Work Force

Core Indicator 5: Employer Assessment of Students

Transfer Preparation

Although transfer remains an obvious and appealing mission for both internal and external audiences, it is a particularly appealing thrust for policy makers—a cost-effective, responsive strategy that broadens the impact of public education by making the first two years of a college education more accessible.

Unfortunately, too many decision makers continue to work from an assumption that community college students will accomplish their transfer journey in continuous incremental segments—from high school to community college to baccalaureate attainment. Since this is often not the case, assessment of this function must track students in order to document transfer patterns. Two indicators are commonly used to track transfer students: Number and Rate Who Transfer, and Performance After Transfer. Although recording student intent to transfer is a logical and essential first step in this process, early statements of student intent are frequently unreliable. Thus, to avoid mistakes in subsequent measurement, initial transfer declaration must continue to be monitored and updated each semester or year.

This line of reasoning suggests the following ground rules. First, request information about student intent more than once. Then, follow student behaviors as evidence of intent. Continuous assessment should provide answers to the following questions: Have students enrolled for more than one semester, earned a designated amount of credit, and/or filed a degree plan? Finally, avoid measuring transfer success based on certificate and degree completion rates at the community college, since many students will follow fluid, open-ended matriculation patterns.

One additional point is worth noting: core indicators in this category provide insights at two different levels of analysis. The Number and Rate Who Transfer indicator is suited to a systemwide rather than institutional level of analysis since transfer goals may legitimately vary from community to community and college to college. The Performance After Transfer indicator can be usefully compared from college to college.

Core Indicator 6: Number and Rate Who Transfer

Core Indicator 7: Performance After Transfer

Developmental Education

By enhancing and reinforcing the skills of underprepared students, developmental education plays an enabling role that supports the community college's ability to achieve its mission. Although it has typically been evaluated exclusively within the college environment, it is also an area of keen interest to policy makers who seek assurances that students receiving remediation perform well in subsequent college-level coursework.

A single core indicator—Success in Subsequent, Related Coursework—is proposed under this heading. It presents a useful way for colleges to determine how well they are performing as they reach out to an enormously diverse student population, many of whom are underprepared. At the same time, it provides a reliable measure of return on investment for policy makers outspoken in their criticism of the public school system and deeply concerned about recurring expenditures to teach basic skills.

In addition to the core measure itself, colleges are encouraged to try to collect data for three additional descriptive statistics: the number enrolling who need remediation, the number needing remediation who are served, and a follow-up comparison of achievement for students who undertake remediation with those who do not. Although some states currently judge the effectiveness of remediation based on a state-mandated test, a strategy that will surely become more prominent, the roundtable proposes an indicator that more directly assesses classroom performance.

Core Indicator 8: Success in Subsequent, Related Coursework

General Education

The goal of general education is to strengthen both the general skills and broad conceptual abilities that students need to function competently in day-to-day life. This particular mission thrust has grown in importance and complexity in recent years. Today's students are expected not only to possess information age skills such as writing and problem solving, but to be able to apply these skills and knowledge in an interdependent, culturally diverse world. Community college professionals who have long stressed the importance of creating a strong educational foundation are now incorporating multicultural themes into across-the-curriculum priorities. Equally important, an increasing number of employers and community leaders are also insisting that college-educated adults must perform more effectively in the demanding, complex world in which they live. They must understand diversity and be comfortable with change.

To assess general education competence, measures in two broad areas are recommended: Critical Literacy Skills (communication, critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal skills, etc.) and Citizenship Skills (community involvement, multicultural understanding, leadership, etc.). At a minimum, the evidence gathered in these categories should go beyond the accumulation of credits. Students

who accrue only a few credits should not be included in research, and assessment should focus on feedback from those in the community who rely on general education competence.

Since general education competencies include both basic and higher order abilities, are developed across the curriculum, and are best demonstrated through the application of knowledge, measuring their achievement requires sophisticated forms of assessment. Many strategies have been tried with varying degrees of success. Community colleges will need to continue to test and refine existing methodologies and develop their own local indicators of general education competence. Several promising strategies are briefly showcased in the technical description in Part VI.

Core Indicator 9: Demonstration of Critical Literacy Skills

Core Indicator 10: Demonstration of Citizenship Skills

Customized Education

In this mission component, community colleges respond to the special, generally short-term needs of an employer or community group. The college listens to a specific request and tailors or adapts its existing menu of programs and services to meet this expressed need. The interactive nature of this customizing process is often described in contractual terms: the client creates a fairly detailed set of specifications, and the college provides the necessary expertise and resources to respond to the request.

There are at least two important reasons for treating customized education as a separate mission thrust. First, the volume of such activity is growing among community colleges and is clearly reflective of greater interest among clients with special educational needs. Second, such programs are often administered by an entrepreneurial unit of the college that is separate from, and thus not included in, the review processes of traditional academic programs.

Although the core indicator for this mission area is similar to the earlier Employer Assessment of Students measure, there are fewer obstacles to overcome in securing valid feedback because a unique, more direct relationship with a client has been established. In customized education, the client works with the college throughout the educational process and is available to continue the dialogue through evaluation and follow-up. In fact, the opportunity for such dialogue not only provides useful feedback about a specific customized program, but can also lead to involvement of constituent groups in other assessment tasks.

Core Indicator 11: Client Assessment of Programs and Services

Community Development

The community development mission of the community college grows out of the social, economic, and cultural circumstances in a local setting. Each relationship

that is formed is both unique and interactive. Each requires that the college remain alert to local needs and that it respond with programs and services that carefully mesh with its institutional capabilities and values.

Measuring effectiveness in this arena is not easy. Unlike other aspects of mission that are defined in less situational terms, community development programs grow out of specific, often unique needs, and their evaluation is, of necessity, idiosyncratic. For this reason, no one methodology is suggested for Core Indicator 12, Responsiveness to Community Needs, beyond the general rule that colleges must in some way identify a client, determine the client's need, and measure the client's involvement in, and satisfaction with, the college's response. In addition, any such measure needs to be monitored over time, if it is to become a true index of responsiveness. A number of potential methodologies are discussed in the technical section of the report.

A second indicator, Core Indicator 13, Participation Rate in Service Area, provides descriptive information about the involvement of individuals and groups with the college. Such a measure can be particularly useful in helping practitioners determine whether there is appropriate, proportional representation from various segments of the community in college programs and services. Because community development requires identifying and reaching out to underserved populations in a service area, this indicator becomes a valuable mechanism for identifying gaps in service.

Core Indicator 12: Responsiveness to Community Needs

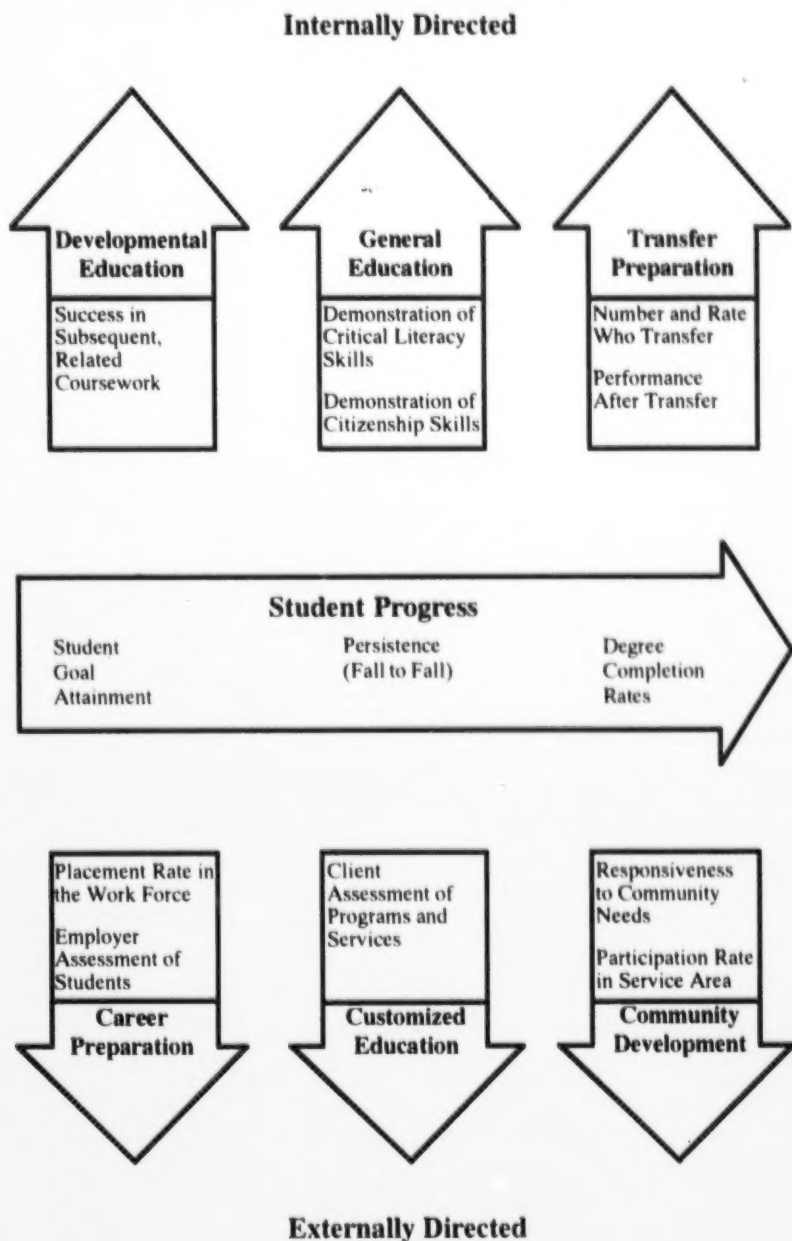
Core Indicator 13: Participation Rate in Service Area

MODELING THE CORE INDICATORS

A model is an abstraction of reality that can be used to improve our understanding of concepts such as effectiveness. Figure 1 depicts the mission-related core indicators in relationship to one another, each contributing to, and following from, student progress.

The core indicators are not random, isolated measures. As the model shows, they can be joined in a comprehensive plan for assessing effectiveness—a plan focused on student progress and its expression in six mission categories. Practitioners are encouraged to use the model as a basis upon which to build effectiveness plans.

Figure 1. Core Indicators of Institutional Effectiveness



CORE INDICATORS: A TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION

The core indicators discussed to this point do not readily lend themselves to measurement. To become operational, they need to be carefully defined and carried out. In the following pages we present technical descriptions for the core indicators. A working definition is provided for each indicator along with a description of appropriate data sources and additional measures.

CORE INDICATOR 1: STUDENT GOAL ATTAINMENT

Measure: The proportion of students who on leaving a community college report that their original goal in attending (or subsequent goal decided while enrolled) has been met.

Data Source(s): The recommended method is periodic surveys of the student population according to a longitudinal design that includes at least the determination of student goal at entry and a follow-up soon after exit to determine if this goal has changed and/or if it has been met. Most desirable is a method whereby student goals are assessed each time the student registers.

Additional Measures: An alternative approach to measuring goal attainment is survey items that list particular intended outcomes of college on instruments such as entering student questionnaires, surveys of currently enrolled students, and regular follow-ups of former students. Such items typically include potential outcomes, such as "learning how to communicate in writing," "learning how to work better in groups," or "learning skills that will enable me to advance on my job." Some fifteen to twenty items can be efficiently administered using five-point Likert-type scales to determine: a) how important the student feels the trait is, and b) how much the college has contributed to development of the trait.

CORE INDICATOR 2: PERSISTENCE (FALL TO FALL)

Measure: The proportion of an identified fall term entering community college student cohort that is still enrolled for at least one credit the following fall term and has not completed a degree or certificate, reported each year from entry to exit. An "identified entering student cohort" is defined as all students registering for their first credits at the community college in a given term; a fall-term cohort is typically used for data analysis and reporting.

Data Source(s): The recommended data source is a continuously updated longitudinal database that tracks an entering community college student cohort from entry to exit using data elements such as course and program enrollment and degrees and certificates awarded (e.g., Ewell, Jones, and Parker, 1988; Palmer, 1990).

CORE INDICATOR 3: DEGREE COMPLETION RATES

Measure: The proportion of an identified entering community college cohort officially enrolled in a degree program that actually completes a degree or certificate, as reported at annual intervals.

Explanation: The emergence of such regulations as Student Right-to-Know and numerous state reporting requirements has highlighted this statistic as a performance indicator, and it is thus impossible to ignore. Recognizing that community college students take as long as seven or eight years to earn a degree, the proposed indicator has no "endpoint" time limit. Also, unlike federal and state regulatory statistics, this indicator includes all entering students—not just those who are full-time, first-time-in-college students. While this may deflate reported graduation rates, it more fully reflects actual community college populations, the majority of which are in fact part-time attenders. Given the sensitivity of this statistic, it should never be presented in isolation: it should be reported selectively so that attendance patterns, course-taking behaviors, and intentions of different student groups are apparent. This indicator should always be reported in conjunction with persistence rates (Core Indicator 2).

Data Source(s): The recommended data source is a continuously updated longitudinal database that tracks an entering community college

student cohort from entry to exit using data elements such as date of initial enrollment, degree awarded, and duration of study. Cohorts should be constructed so that they are consistent with (but more inclusive than) those required for current federal and state reporting.

Additional Measures:

The following additional statistics are recommended to more fully communicate effectiveness:

- reporting data for full-time, first-time-in-college students (e.g., Student Right-to-Know students) v. other students in the cohort.
- reporting data according to whether students completed twelve credits.
- reporting data according to whether students reported "degree attainment" as an initial or current goal.
- reporting data for current proportions of students attending part-time v. full-time.
- reporting data for current proportions of students reported as successfully transferring or obtaining employment without having earned a degree or certificate from the community college.

CORE INDICATOR 4: PLACEMENT RATE IN THE WORK FORCE

Measure:

The proportion of an identified entering community college student cohort achieving a "marketable skill" (i.e., completing at least three occupational/technical courses in a particular field of training) who obtain employment in a field directly related to this skill within one year of last attendance.

Data Source(s):

The predominant method used is a follow-up questionnaire administered to former students periodically by mail. If available, state employment information (generally available through the state's Department of Labor or equivalent) provides a more direct method of assessment. Such information is now in place in seven states. The obvious limitation of this methodology is the fact that many state databases do not contain the required job information to adequately identify occupation.

Additional Measures:

The following additional measures are recommended to better communicate effectiveness:

- reporting data for students according to prior credit earned at the community college and by whether or not a degree or certificate was earned.
- reporting data for students according to occupations deemed both "directly and indirectly related" to the field of training.
- a statistic that reports the placement rate of all students enrolling for at least one occupational/technical course at the community college (this relaxes the "marketable skills" restriction contained in the core measure).

CORE INDICATOR 5:

EMPLOYER ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS

Measure: The proportion of a sample of regional employers in a given field indicating that their employees who received training at the community college exhibit skills and job performance at rates equivalent or superior to all employees.

Data Source(s): The recommended method is a periodic cross-sectional survey of a sample of area employers using an open-ended questionnaire requesting an employer to list the specific programs and institutions from which they like to recruit or from which they obtain "their best employees." Because of typically higher response rates, this is preferred to the more typical "two-phase" follow-up method in which former students are first contacted to identify their employers and the employers then surveyed. Multiple attributes of performance should be assessed and a Likert-type rating scale of at least five points should be used in the questionnaire. If resources are available, in-depth interviews with employers are recommended.

Additional Measures: To render employer ratings more meaningful, it is recommended that these be additionally broken down by field of training, by job classification, and by specific performance attributes (e.g., specific job skills, work attitude and sense of responsibility, potential for advancement, etc.).

CORE INDICATOR 6:

NUMBER AND RATE WHO TRANSFER

Measure: The proportion of an identified entering community college cohort actively enrolled in a degree program at that institution and completing at least twelve semester hours of credit (or

equivalent) who enroll within two years for at least twelve college-level credits in a degree program at a four-year college or university.

Data Source(s): The preferred data source for this indicator is actual student record data obtained from the transfer institution. Available methodologies listed in order of desirability include:

- state-level enrollment information that directly matches community college and four-year public college attenders by means of a student identification number.
- electronic transfer of transcript information in a defined format (e.g., SPEEDE, AACROA standard, North Texas Consortium).
- aggregate reporting obtained periodically from senior institutions.
- student self-reports obtained through a follow-up questionnaire administered to former community college students.

Additional Measures:

The following additional measures are recommended to better communicate effectiveness:

- reporting data for students according to the total prior number of credits earned at the community college, and by prior degree completion.
- reporting data for students according to whether they explicitly indicated an intent to transfer, obtained by means of a regularly administered survey of student intent.
- the proportion of former community college students enrolling for at least one credit at the transfer institution (relaxing the 12-hour transfer constraint at the senior institution).

CORE INDICATOR 7: PERFORMANCE AFTER TRANSFER

Measure:

The proportion of regular college-level courses at the transfer (receiving) institution completed with a grade of "C" or better by students who previously attended the community college, compared to a parallel proportion obtained for students who began their studies as first-time freshmen at the transfer institution.

Data Source(s): Same as Core Indicator 3.

Additional Measures:

This core measure is usefully tabulated for the following student groups to better communicate effectiveness:

- reporting data for students according to the amount of community college credit earned prior to transfer; fifteen credit blocks are suggested (e.g., less than fifteen credits, 15-30, 31-45, 46 credits and over).
- reporting data for students according to whether they earned a degree or certificate prior to transfer.

CORE INDICATOR 8:

SUCCESS IN SUBSEQUENT, RELATED COURSEWORK

Measure: The proportion of an identified entering student cohort assessed as deficient in one or more of the basic skills (reading, writing, and computation) who subsequently: a) successfully complete developmental work intended to remediate this deficiency, and b) within one year complete, with a grade of "C" or better, their first college-level courses requiring the use of this skill.

Data Source(s): The recommended data source is a continuously updated longitudinal database that tracks an entering community college student cohort from entry to exit using data elements such as basic skill proficiency levels, course enrollments, and course grades (e.g., Ewell, Jones, and Parker, 1988; Palmer 1990).

Additional Measures: The following additional statistics are recommended to further communicate effectiveness on this indicator:

- the comparative persistence and degree completion rates of students assessed as deficient and remediated for each basic skill compared to similar rates for: a) students assessed as proficient and, b) those assessed as deficient and not remediated for each basic skill.
- the comparative rates of successful college-level course completion with a grade of "C" or better for these three populations.

CORE INDICATOR 9:

DEMONSTRATION OF CRITICAL LITERACY SKILLS

Measure: No single statistic satisfies the intent of this indicator.

Explanation: Literacy has become a complex social concept, but this does not absolve community colleges from demonstrating that they develop such skills. Assessing literacy requires a multiplicity of

methods appropriate to the kinds of literacy tasks that students will be facing in the community and on the job. Mere data collection is not enough. Once the college community agrees that a particular set of literacy skills is important as an outcome, it must ensure that such skills are: a) taught throughout the curriculum in both transfer and occupationally related courses and b) regularly embodied in local assessments designed by faculty.

Data Source(s): Many methods are appropriate to determine literacy skills at both the institutional and programmatic level. Among those recommended are:

- faculty-designed instruments to be administered to students as appropriate and modeled on such national literacy assessments as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Adult Literacy Scales. Typically, these assessments present students with natural literacy tasks such as reading a set of instructions, interpreting published charts and graphs, completing a required form, or reading and interpreting a schedule.
- specially designed "in-basket" exercises that require students to assimilate a variety of material, interpret its significance, and prioritize it for action. Exercises of this kind can be embedded in capstone experiences that are a part of many applied programs.
- exercises that require students to read and interpret a typical news story.
- specially designed questionnaire items for inclusion on student follow-up surveys about behavior in areas such as current reading habits, perceptions of current events, etc.

CORE INDICATOR 10: DEMONSTRATION OF CITIZENSHIP SKILLS

Measure: No single statistic satisfies the intent of this indicator.

Explanation: Citizenship is also a complex attribute that requires the use of multiple evidence-gathering techniques to assess adequately, and requires an institutionwide process to ensure that its development and assessment are included in instructional delivery.

Data Source(s): Among the most promising methods that can be used in gathering information consistent with this indicator are:

- student portfolios documenting citizenship activities they have participated in while enrolled, such as volunteer work, memberships in student groups, active participation in political campaigns, etc.
- documentation of student participation in group or problem-solving exercises in which leadership and group-membership skills are potentially demonstrated, along with appropriate occupational or technical skills.
- specially designed exercises included in regular course examinations that require students to determine the impact of their actions on others or their broader responsibilities to others.
- specially designed questionnaire items included in alumni follow-up surveys that determine whether the student has voted in a local election, participated in voluntary or community service work, or follows the news regularly.

CORE INDICATOR 11:

CLIENT ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Measure: No single statistic currently meets the intent of this indicator.

Explanation: Responding to the intent of this indicator requires the institution to determine: a) the array of different clients that it serves; b) the nature, types, and volume of programs, services, and activities it provides to different clients; and c) the extent to which clients are involved and satisfied with programs, services, and activities. "Client" is a term that describes many different individuals, groups, and organizations coming into contact with community colleges for many reasons whose involvement and satisfaction must be independently determined and assessed. Successful reporting of this indicator will thereby require multiple methods for gathering information, including surveys, focus group meetings, face-to-face and telephone interviews, and participant observation.

Data Source(s): Some of the data sources that can be used to collect information consistent with this indicator are the following:

- specially designed evaluations administered to clients participating in programs and services to determine their expectations and the extent to which the program or service met, exceeded, or fell short of expectations.
- periodic surveys carried out with client groups; these are typically mail or telephone surveys using an instrument

designed to collect information about both client involvement and satisfaction with the program or service.

- written reports by professional staff members based on: a) observation of clients participating in programs and services and resulting expressions of satisfaction and b) interviews with clients during and after contact with the program or service.
- focus group meetings with client groups to determine involvement and satisfaction with programs and services.

CORE INDICATOR 12:

RESPONSIVENESS TO COMMUNITY NEEDS

Measure: No single statistic currently meets the intent of this indicator.

Explanation: Responding to the intent of this indicator requires the institution to engage in an ongoing process of: a) identifying community needs and expectations, b) demonstrating that it is responsive to these needs and expectations by continuously improving and adapting its programs and services, and c) demonstrating that the constituency groups served are satisfied with and have benefited from these programs and services. "Community" will almost always consist of distinct constituencies and subgroups whose needs and expectations must be independently determined and assessed. Meeting the challenge of this indicator will thus require multiple methods for gathering evidence, but more importantly it will require an established, ongoing process of planning and review to ensure that this evidence is appropriately integrated, interpreted, and acted upon by the institution.

Data Source(s): Some of the data sources that can be used to collect information consistent with this indicator are the following:

- periodic needs assessments carried out with citizens in the college's service region; these are typically mailed or telephone household surveys, using an instrument designed to collect information about both current educational and service needs, and about contact and satisfaction with the college.
- surveys and/or focus group meetings with community organizations, citizen's groups, employers, etc. to determine needs and current levels of satisfaction.
- environmental scanning processes designed to systematically examine the content of printed matter such as newspa-

per stories, editorials, job advertisements, and employment and other socioeconomic data about community trends, to determine long-term patterns of community development and future needs.

- specially designed evaluations periodically administered to participants in each program or event sponsored by the college, to assess the expectations of those participating and the degree to which their expectations were met.

CORE INDICATOR 13:

PARTICIPATION RATE IN SERVICE AREA

Measure: The proportion of the total population aged 17 or over residing in the designated service area of the community college, participating in at least one organized activity (course, program, service, event, etc.) sponsored by the college in the past year.

Data Source(s): The most common method is attendance records at all college-sponsored classes, events, activities, etc. maintained by the college. The recommended method is a periodic community impact survey administered to a representative sample of residents in the service region. This survey should contain items describing various types of contact with the college (formal and informal), and overall reactions and satisfaction rates.

Additional Measures: Unduplicated headcount enrollment and total attendance figures can be usefully reported for this indicator. To get an approximate measure of extent of use, another useful statistic is the total number of recorded contact hours (duration of events X number participating in the event) for all activities (both instructional and non-instructional) divided by the service region population.

NEXT STEPS: SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

This report has grown out of a need for greater precision in determining community college effectiveness. The Roundtable recommends that the core indicators, which are designed to help achieve this focus, be used in the following ways:

- Community college practitioners are encouraged to use the indicators to improve programs and services at their college and to reference them as an authoritative source with various external groups who undertake to evaluate key components of the college's mission.
- Universities, associations, consortia, and councils with expertise to offer in the community college effectiveness arena are encouraged to use the report as a framework for research.
- Local, state, regional, and national organizations who set policy for and evaluate community colleges are encouraged to incorporate these measures into their organizational agendas.
- The American Association of Community Colleges is encouraged to showcase the core indicators presented herein, to support their further development and use, and to reference them in their frequent discussions with national leaders.

We believe that much important work remains to be done. A focus on core indicators not only brings greater coherence to the evaluation of this segment of higher education, it helps to demonstrate the community college's deep and abiding concern for the students and communities they serve. Ultimately, it is this concern, coupled with an understanding that real progress comes as a result of many small, steady acts of improvement, that will make both practitioners and policy makers vigilant in matters of institutional effectiveness in the community college.

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